

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Big Ridge State Park - A Haunted Hike For the Halloween Season

By Fran Wallas

In Maynardville, a trail in Big Ridge State Park offers something for the Halloween season as it passes a reportedly haunted area. Ranger-led programs through the month of October feature spooky topics.

This five mile moderately difficult hike begins on the Lake Trail. There are two side trails on this first half-mile stretch. You will only want to take the steep climb to the Loyston Overlook if the leaves have fallen so that you can get a view of the lake. Otherwise stay on the main trail to the dam built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the late 1930s. You may want to stop here to enjoy the view of the lake and the fall colors. Although this was once farmland, the area has become a forest of oak and hickory. If you return in the winter, you may see Golden and Bald Eagles and migrating waterfowl.

After you cross the dam, turn to your right and continue on the Lake Trail. At the junction of the Lake Trail and Ghost House Loop, turn left and then bear to your right. The eastern arm of Ghost House Loop will take you to Norton Cemetery. You will find the sunken grave of Maston Hutchinson, who fought in the Civil War. Supposedly his home was haunted, and people have heard eerie sounds in the area. You may want to go to a ranger program to hear about the strange occurrences. These programs are offered every Friday and Saturday night

in October except for Halloween. Call the park office for details.

Continue past the cemetery, and a short connector trail will lead you from Ghost House Loop to Big Valley Trail, which is blazed in red. To complete the loop, turn left onto Big Valley, then turn left on Dark Hollow West Trail.

The Dark Hollow West Trail is now a path, but used to be a county road. You can still see areas of old homesites. Before 1934 when TVA purchased the land, there were 95 houses, two schools and six churches within the park boundary. For those who like to backpack, enjoy the backcountry campsite on your right. Two other backcountry campsites are also available, but you need to check on the condition of the trails. You can tell your own ghost stories and listen for Hutchinson's horses riding down the road.

Be sure to bring lots of water because the water source dries up during parts of the year. The trail crosses a bridge and stays along the edge of the lake back to the dam. Turn right, cross the dam, and follow the trail back to the parking lot.

For those who would like to take a longer steeper hike, from the intersection of Big Valley Trail and Dark Hollow continue up Big Valley Trail all the way to Indian Rock. This side trip adds about 3.5 miles to your hike. Settlers used this route to take their corn to the Norton Mill. The trail



The Norton Cemetery is one of three historic cemeteries you pass on a hike on the Lake Trail and Ghost House Loop in Big Ridge State Park in Maynardville. Below: Trails in Big Ridge State Park wind through hardwood forests. If you miss the fall colors, you will get to see the spectacular views through the winter.

runs along the top of Big Ridge. There are views in both directions and wonderful fall colors. There are also the remains of settlements from the 1800s and some very large oak trees. You need to backtrack to the Dark Hollow West junction.

For information, call the Big Ridge State Park office at 1-800-471-5305.

### Directions

Directions to the Big Ridge trailhead: take Highway 75 to exit 122. Take Highway 61 east. The brown state park signs will lead you to the park entrance on the left. Follow the signs to the office where you can pick up a trail map. Because of the pine beetle damage, you will need to check at the office about the condition of the trails. The office parking lot is a good place to leave your car for the day. Walk past the ball field to the end of the parking lot and follow the road to the left. You will see the trailhead on your right.

#### Big Ridge State Park



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